

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 11, 1951

'You Are Wise Senior Rowland...'

John Rowland was one of the first men to enjoy the golden days of California. Because of a bountiful Providence and the discovery of gold in California, those early days were often called the golden days of California history. He led the vanguard of the great westward migration that has become part of world history.

John Rowland was the grandfather of Mrs. Joseph B. Colling of Seaside. Yesterday we wrote of Mr. Colling's parents and grandparents, pioneer residents of Los Angeles. Today we will tell the story as given to us by Mrs. Colling, of her ancestors and their life in Southern California.

During the latter part of the 18th century, about the year 1765, William Rowland, his wife and their three children came from London, England, to America. John Albert Rowland, the youngest of nine children was born in Maryland in 1791, and became a California pioneer. He was 32 years old when he settled in Taos, New Mexico, and began his business career. There he met another Englishman, William Workman. The two became business partners and fast friends until their deaths.

In 1825 Rowland married Maria de la Encaracion Martinez of Taos. Workman also married a woman of Taos and since the two were daughters of Spanish land owners or "hijas del pais" or daughters of the country," the men applied for nationalization as Mexican citizens.

Rowland made his first trip to California early in the year 1841 to look over the country "and to see for himself the land of promise." He returned to Taos and persuaded the Workman and other American and Spanish families that the best thing for them to do under the political conditions in New Mexico, was to go to California to live.

Under the Mexican congress law of Aug. 18, 1824, an extremely liberal policy was adopted, under which any Mexican of good, proven character, or any foreigner willing to become a naturalized citizen of Mexico and accept the Roman Catholic faith, might acquire, for the asking, 11 square leagues of land. One league was to be irrigable soil, four leagues prudent upon rain and six leagues for grazing, with the grant there was freedom

from taxes for five years. A league comprises 4,438 acres. A rancho of less than 11 leagues was considered small in early California. There were 1,045 land grants made in California before the American occupation.

In 1820 the La Puente district in Southern California was granted by the Spanish governor, Pablo Vicente de Sola, to Ramon F. Aguilar, a Spaniard, who deserted the district when the new Mexican government took over in 1822. Rowland and Workman took over this grant January 4, 1842.

Rowland came to Monterey by horseback seeking the grant for himself and Workman. He carried letters of recommendation from Padre Estenaga of Mission San Gabriel. Here he first went to Arguella, who was the proper man to help him prepare a petition to obtain the grant of land.

Rowland then visited Governor Alvarado, who did not sign the official papers until he was convinced that Rowland and Workman were not mere adventurers. A writer summarized the deal as follows: "Governor Alvarado said "You are very wise, Senior Rowland, and I can see where you would make a good property owner, willing to care for it dependents and to pay your share of the public debt. Let me have the \$1,000 and I shall grant you a preliminary title to the property this day." The preliminary title was to 48,790.55 acres.

A grant of land, without limitations, was made by Gov. Pio Pico, last Mexican governor of the Californias, on July 22, 1845, to Rowland and Workman, although they had possessed it during three years time. The United States government passed the title and Rowland and Workman were granted patent right to Rancho La Puente on April 19, 1867—17 years after the U.S. had acquired California.

Mrs. Ayrela Rowland Vejar Colling is the daughter Thomas Rowland, the son of the California pioneer. His brother William Rowland was for many years the Sheriff of Los Angeles County. A niece of Mrs. Colling, Miss Leonore Rowland of Puente, has compiled a small booklet which tells the fascinating story of her great-grandfather, John Rowland.